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Tighter Firearm Rules Rolled Out After Fatal Shootings in Sussex and Plymouth

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New restrictions on gun ownership have been announced this week, aiming to close serious gaps in the licensing process after a series of devastating shootings. Individuals with a record of violence or domestic abuse will now be automatically disqualified from owning firearms under the updated guidance issued to police forces on Tuesday.

The revised rules come in the wake of growing concern over firearm safety, following high-profile tragedies in Woodmancote, Sussex, and Keyham, near Plymouth. Authorities have

faced mounting criticism over their handling of firearms applications, with coroners and victims' families pointing to systemic failings in recent cases.

One of the most significant updates includes a mandatory requirement for police officers to conduct interviews with partners or others living in the same home as firearms licence applicants. This aims to detect any signs of domestic abuse or other red flags that may not appear in an applicant's formal record. Forces are also instructed to conduct more thorough checks into past incidents of violence when assessing someone's suitability to own a weapon.

These changes follow a 2022 inquest into the Keyham mass shooting, which identified serious errors in the licensing process. The shooter, Jake Davison, aged 22, legally owned a shotgun despite a known history of violence. In August 2021, he murdered his mother and four others, including a young child, before taking his own life in a horrific eight minute rampage.

Authorities have also updated the criteria surrounding honesty in licence applications. Any attempt to hide relevant medical history, including mental health issues, could now automatically result in a rejected application. In one previous case, Robert Needham was granted a shotgun licence even after admitting he had not disclosed his history of depression and stress. He later used the weapon to kill his partner, Kelly Fitzgibbons, and their two daughters in Woodmancote in 2020.

Kelly Fitzgibbons' sister, Emma Ambler, welcomed the changes but expressed caution over their effectiveness. "I still believe that holding a gun licence is a privilege and not a right," she said. "The priority has to be the safety of society, and it's so important to stop these extremely dangerous weapons falling into the wrong hands, which these changes will go some way to doing."

Policing Minister Dame Diana Johnson stressed the importance of these measures: "Only those who meet the highest standards of safety and responsibility should be permitted to use shotguns or firearms, and it is crucial that police have full information about the suitability of all applicants for these lethal weapons. The events in Woodmancote in 2020, Plymouth in 2021, and other cases provide a tragic reminder of what can happen when these weapons are in the hands of the wrong people, and we must do everything we can to protect the public."

Further changes could be introduced later this year through a new consultation. That review is expected to consider additional controls on shotgun ownership and explore ways to strengthen oversight of private firearms sales.

As police forces begin to implement the new regulations, families of victims and campaigners continue to press for full accountability and lasting reform in the licensing system. The recent changes mark a significant shift in how the UK manages firearm safety, but questions remain over whether they will be enough to prevent future tragedies.